

# Asian Consultation on Education for Global Health Leadership

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The Asian Consultation on Education for Global Health Leadership Sponsored by the China Medical Board and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and organized by the Hanoi School of Public Health was held in Hanoi Vietnam, from 4-5 November 2008. It was attended by 30 participants from ten countries: Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, China, Cambodia, Bangladesh, India, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, and the United States. The AAAH was represented by Dr. Sarath Samarage, Member of the AAAH Steering Committee and the AAAH Focal point for Sri Lanka.

Over the two days of the conference, there were about 14 presentations. Following opening remarks by Dean Le Vu Anh of the Hanoi School of Public Health, Dr. Lincoln Chen of the China Medical Board laid out the meeting agenda with particular emphasis on the importance of developing public health manpower in the region, especially to anticipate the growing significance of chronic diseases. In her remarks Kathy Cahill of the Gates Foundation emphasized that the education system should produce health workers whose training is competency-based and appropriate for the country's disease burden. The education system for health workers needs to be appropriate to the needs of the Ministry of Health and curricula reform should aim to achieve desired health outcomes. Research should also be linked to desired health outcomes. Faculty development is critical and must be scaled up. To achieve this, there must be far more South-to-South collaboration (one of the goals of the meeting). This can be achieved through regional networks for training, financing, and technology development and transfer. A culture that emphasizes continuing education and life-long learning will ensure that faculty will be developed and retained.

Three examples were presented on innovations in networking for capacity building—the Mekong Basin Disease Surveillance (MBDS) Network; the Asia-Pacific Action Alliance on Human Resources for Health (AAAH); and the South East Asian Public Health Education Institutes Network (SEAPHEIN).

Dr. Sarath Samarage presenting the AAAH as a case study for innovations in networking for capacity building said, the vision of AAAH is to strengthen human resources for health (HRH) planning and management capacity for adequate, equitable, efficient, and effective HRH and health systems in the Asia-Pacific region that promote health equity and quality improvement. The AAAH Secretariat is currently based at the International Health Policy Program, Thailand. The priority areas of AAAH are: 1) advocacy and support for strengthening of member country HRH planning and management; 2) information for monitoring of the HRH situation; 3) knowledge generation, management and

sharing; 4) capacity strengthening; and 5) coordination of technical support requested by a member country. The organization works closely with relevant UN agencies. In summarizing their experience, Dr. Samarage noted that first and foremost innovation is about personal competencies and attitudes, about selling ideas to the right people, in the right place, at the right time. Networks are necessary to help build trust and momentum for 'risky' ventures and to obtain the perspectives needed to create successful innovations.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Witaya Yoosook of the Faculty of Public Health, Mahidol University gave a brief overview of his institution and then reported on SEAPHEIN and its activities. SEAPHEIN was established by WHO/SEARO in 2004, with 35 founding member schools, and its secretariat is based at Mahidol University. The network has a mission to collaborate with Southeast Asian member countries to improve and sustain the quality and relevance of public health education to address the increasing challenges of health improvement. With its members, the network promotes the use of core competencies, guidelines, educational standards, and institutional accreditation, and it assists members with international faculty exchanges and collaborative research.

Discussing the issue of public health leadership, much of the discussion focused on how to measure public health competencies. How should competency be evaluated? How soon after graduation should it be assessed and how should it be done? By examination? By field experience? Should a public health internship be required and how would it be defined? What is the role of continuing education? How can public health education and leadership move the non-communicable/chronic disease agenda forward? How should countries address the growing gap between urban and rural in terms of manpower availability in public health?

The consultation was concluded with a discussion on how best to improve networking. What is the best mechanism for institutions to network among themselves so that they can address real problems in real time? Is this best done between institutions, through international organizations, or by independent organizations? How can programs best share teaching experiences and/or develop material that all can benefit from – e.g. case development? How can the internet be better utilized? How can networking be used to benefit students as well as faculty? A number of foundations are becoming interested in the development of public health institutions and by extension their faculty. Networking between them is an attractive strategy as almost all schools of public health in developing countries are short-staffed and cannot cover all the required subjects. Faculty exchange between institutions greatly opens up teaching options.

These discussions were followed by closing remarks from the China Medical Board, the Gates Foundation, and the Hanoi School of Public Health. One of the key lessons of the workshop was the need to establish a critical mass of skilled and committed faculty to support the development of effective public health education programs in the long term. There was consensus that this dialogue should continue with a follow up meeting to explore networking, course syllabi, faculty exchange, research opportunities, and possible field experiences. There are clear opportunities for institutional and faculty collaboration as each country attempts to increase and improve public health education to try to fulfil their manpower needs in public health practice, leadership, and research. A CD was produced containing all pre-conference papers, additional articles, presentations, and a roster of participants.